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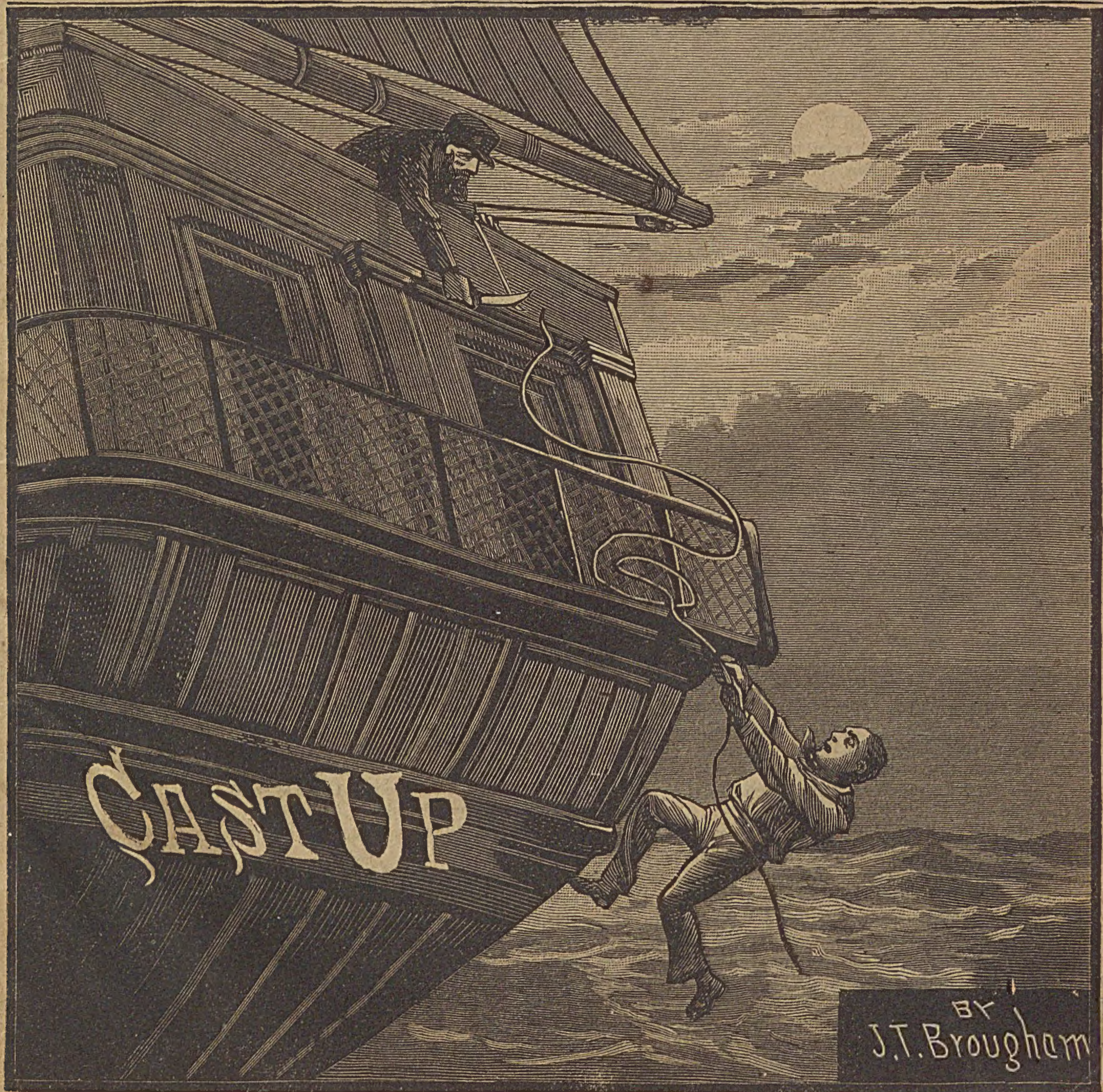
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BY
J.T. Brougham

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CAST UP;

OR,

ADVENTURES ON THE BRINY DEEP

By J. T. BROUGHAM,

Author of "Yankee Donovan," "The Fatal Fingers," "Nameless; or, 108," Etc., Etc., Etc.

PROLOGUE.

THE scene was a dimly illumined room, in a handsome house, that stood a short distance beyond New York City's limits, on a certain night toward the end of April in the year 1855.

The room was sumptuously furnished in every detail, as a sleeping apartment, and faced the front of the house, which was covered with thick creeping-vines. The weather was mild, the sky cloudy, and a gentle breeze rustled the branches of the trees surrounding the dwelling.

The dim light of the lamp disclosed a thin, white and wretched looking man of about fifty, lying on the bed, and by the window stood a young fellow of eighteen, while close beside the fast dying man sat another individual, whose age was hard to determine, as a bushy black beard covered the lower portion of his face. The faces of the three expressed each a different sentiment; that of the sufferer a combination of fear, rage and hatred, that of the youth intense curiosity, and the dark eyes of the bearded individual a baleful gleam of triumph.

"What you ask is impossible, Ralph Darrell!" the invalid was saying.

"Nothing is impossible at the eleventh hour, Joe Morgan," was the quick reply.

"But I refuse to alter my plan; I will make this restitution."

"You are a fool. After keeping the fortune five years, why resign it now?"

"My conscience troubles me."

"Bah! You never before had a conscience."

"It is different now that consumption is killing me."

"Perhaps," sneered the other, "you imagine you can atone for the past?"

"I can at least do some good before it is too late."

"The girl and her mother must be dead by this time."

"No. I had a letter from them only a week ago."

"And they said——"

"They are living in St. Augustine, Florida, in extreme poverty."

"If you restore this fortune to them our business will be ruined."

"I cannot help it. This is decisive. You may go."

"You are mad to ruin me thus. Imagine the misery to me when it is known that the presumed rich firm of Darrell & Morgan, ship agents, failed. Why, without money to back me now, my few thousand dollars will go with the business, and I will be ruined—I will starve."

"I cannot help it," was the firm reply.

"I tell you again, you are mad! You have no heirs—you are alone in the world. Leave me this fortune of half a million, and I will pledge you my most sacred oath to see to the welfare of Mrs. Holmes and Jennie."

"No, again. It is enough that while I was the guardian of the girl, when her father died in Florida, and left them with his fortune in

my care, that I appropriated the fortune and left them to starve in St. Augustine."

"You are determined, then, to restore this money?" demanded the other, furiously.

"Such is my resolution."

"You shall not do it!"

"Why?"

"Because I will prevent it by fair means or foul!"

"You are a villain!"

"No worse than yourself," was the bitter reply.

"True," murmured the sick man, and a violent fit of coughing seized him.

"Will you do as I say?" demanded Darrell again, as he arose.

"Never!"

"Then I shall use my own measures to get it."

"Leave me!" exclaimed Morgan, pointing to the door.

"I will go, but beware of me in the near future!" exclaimed the other, passionately; and without uttering another word, he put on his hat and hurried out of the room, banging the door after him.

Fully ten minutes of deep silence ensued after his departure, Joseph Morgan remaining buried in profound meditation meantime; then suddenly looking up, he shivered, and gazed at the open windows at which the thick, damask curtains were shaking softly, as if the gentle breeze had chilled him. But it was not that; his gloomy thought of approaching death and his past wickedness had only convulsed him.

"Edwin!" he suddenly exclaimed, in feeble tones.

"Ay, sir!" replied a cheery voice, and the youth hurried to his bedside from the window, where he had been standing, silently taking in the foregoing scene.

"Edwin," said the dying man, "you heard our conversation?"

"Yes, sir," was the respectful reply.

"Sit down here beside me; I wish to speak to you."

The youth complied silently.

"Edwin Hazleton," said Morgan, after a pause, "I can trust you, can't I?"

"With your life, sir. I am under a debt of obligation to you which nothing can efface. Coming to New York after the death of my parents in Boston, I was starving in the streets when you picked me up two years ago, and gave me a position on one of your vessels as second-mate."

"You think I am good; in reality, I am a rascal."

"Oh, sir——"

"Do not interrupt me. I will confide a secret to you which you must swear never to reveal. Swear you will not reveal what I am about to tell you, and swear that you will execute the mission I am about to impose upon you, and then I will not only be at peace with myself, knowing that my trust in you is not misplaced, but

"I shall also reward you by leaving you in my will my schooner yacht, the Sea Angel."

"I swear!" replied the youth, solemnly holding up his right hand.

"Good!" murmured the other, regarding him with a fixed, penetrating look for a moment. "Now listen attentively to what I have to say. But first look and see if we are alone."

"There is no one in the room," said Edwin, after searching about.

"Did you lock the door?"

"Ay, sir. We are alone!"

He would not have spoken so confidently if he had seen the wily Darrell, upon leaving the house, climb up the thick vines that covered the front of the building, and hanging on the window-sill, listen intently on the other side of the curtains to all that they said.

"Five years ago," commenced Mr. Morgan, "Jack Holmes and I were intimate friends. Jack was rich and I was poor. I understood the business of a ship-broker, and induced Jack to go in the business with me. He had a wife and a daughter who was then twelve years old. This was in St. Augustine. In less than a year Jack died, with every cent he possessed invested in our business. About that time I met Ralph Darrell, who I subsequently discovered was a deep rascal. Leaving me guardian of his daughter, and his fortune involved in the business, poor Jack did not dream of any wrong. But Darrell filled my brain with his villainy, induced me to keep Holmes' money, leave St. Augustine, let the widow and orphan shift for themselves, and come here to New York. Alas, I heeded his proposal, and together, with our ill-gotten gains, we started another line of ships. Darrell had but little money, and now that I am dying he wants me to leave this money to him. My conscience troubled me, however, and I sold all but one of the ships—the Blizzard, and my private yacht, the Sea Angel. With the proceeds, I now have a fortune of about half a million—twice as much as Jack Holmes had in the business, and I mean to give it all to those I robbed, while the yacht shall be for you."

"Oh, Mr. Morgan, you are so generous——" commenced Edwin.

"Stop! I am a villain, I tell you. But let me finish. It is my intention to put this fortune under your care. You must become responsible for it, and see that it is delivered to Mrs. Holmes or Jennie at the risk of your life. You heard Darrell's threat, and I know him to be an unscrupulous wretch, who would not hesitate at anything to gain possession of it. He is avaricious, mean and crafty."

"But how am I to restore this fortune?"

"I will tell you. As you are aware, there is a margin on gold, and in view of this fact, I had it all converted into this precious metal in order that it would bring more than its face value in the market. This gold I have had packed in canvas bags, and these bags are distributed throughout ten cases of merchandise which are stowed away in the hold of the Blizzard with the rest of a cargo with which she is loaded. I did this for the sake of security. In the first place, to ship it like regular freight will detract the suspicion of Darrell from it; in the second place, the crew will not know anything about it, and would not be apt to try to steal it; and in the third place, that is the easiest way to transport it from here to its owners in St. Augustine."

"And you want me to go with this money and see that it is delivered properly?"

"Exactly. I have also made a good precaution. The yacht is manned with a crew, and will follow after the Blizzard to guard it, and I have armed both vessels." He paused, then whispered, "Before reaching Florida, these cases containing the gold must be transferred to the hold of the yacht, in order to defeat any schemes that Darrell may concoct to gain possession of the money upon landing it. Do you understand, Edwin?"

"Yes, sir. And Mrs. Holmes?"

"Ah! you do not know what to say to her, do you? But you need say nothing. I have a letter here," and he drew an envelope from under his pillow and handed it to the youth, "that will explain every thing. Long before she gets it I will be dead."

"If she ever gets it at all!" murmured the man outside of the window, grimly.

"And when am I to set sail, sir?" asked the youth.

"To-morrow night. The captains and crews are all ready. And here," he added, pressing another envelope into the young man's hand, "is one thousand dollars to pay all such expenses as you may incur. I have only one injunction to give you before you go, and that is to keep a brave heart, do your duty faithfully, shun Ralph Darrell

as you would a venomous viper, and constantly keep yourself armed against treachery."

Spending another hour with his employer, Edwin was given all his instructions, and then took his leave of Mr. Morgan. He had hardly been gone from the room an hour, and the dying man had fallen asleep, when Darrell cautiously entered the room from behind the curtains, dropped a white powder into the tumbler of medicine that stood on the table near the bed, and as silently took his departure, clambering out the window and climbing down the vines. It took all of the next day for Edwin to complete his final arrangements for departure, and an hour before the time he went to Mr. Morgan's house to tell him that the vessels were about to set sail, when he received the startling intelligence that Morgan was dead. It was sudden and very unexpected, and no one knew to what to attribute it, save his lingering sickness suddenly taking a bad turn.

Having nothing further to do but carry out his mission, Edwin left word with the captain of the yacht to set sail at once, and then went aboard the Blizzard to tell the captain that it was time to go. He was met by the first officer, however, who told him that the captain was confined to his berth with sickness. The captain had left orders with the mate, however, to act under Edwin's orders. Therefore they put to sea with no further delay. The sickness of the captain lasted nearly a week, and by that time the Blizzard, which was a fine clipper bark, had gone as far as Savannah, Ga., with but a poor wind. There was a crew of twenty men, including the captain and officers, and the bark was supposed to be freighted with general merchandise. The foremast hands were a rascally looking set, but the captain had engaged them. Edwin had looked in vain for the Sea Angel, but never saw any more of her than he did of the captain of the bark, who kept secluded in his cabin, leaving the first officer in command. One evening, as the bark was running along off shore half a league under a full pressure of canvas, Edwin stood leaning on the weather bulwarks gazing pensively into the dark sea. The watch on deck were all clustered forward, and a thick gloom had settled down.

Suddenly a man in costume silently approached him, and touched him on the arm.

"Hello!" exclaimed Edwin, in startled tones, suddenly wheeling around.

"I thought I would interrupt your reverie, Mr. Hazleton."

"Good Heaven!" exclaimed Edwin, in horror. "It is Ralph Darrell!"

"Yes," hissed the other, "and I am captain of this craft."

"You—captain!" gasped Edwin, in astonishment.

"Yes—I—captain!" exclaimed the other. "And that fortune is mine!"

"Yours?"

"Ay. I said I would have it. Give me that letter in your pocket."

"Never!"

"Then take the consequence of your folly!" he cried, in tones of fury.

And raising a sheath knife, he plunged it into the breast of the youth, caught him as he was falling, snatched a letter from his inside pocket, and with an exclamation of triumph he raised the youth in his brawny arms, and hurled him over the bulwarks into the sea!

No one saw the dastardly deed, and with a chuckle of satisfaction as direful as the appearance of a dark storm that was rising in the north, he stole away, and crawled into his cabin like a demon.

CHAPTER I.

CAST UP.

THE Sea Angel was manned by an honest crew, but the captain, one Simon Bilks, was an accomplice of Ralph Darrell, and had his instructions how to proceed. He was obliged to follow out the instructions of Morgan, in order to blind the sailors to his evil intentions, for Morgan had hired such foremast hands as had been under Edwin on other vessels, and all of these men liked the young man and hated Bilks.

The captain was a man of heavy build, short, bewhiskered, and had a long nose, sharp eyes and a stubborn, brutal nature.

An unusual number of empty water casks had been shipped on leaving port, and on the second day out they mysteriously disappeared.

"It is strange, captain," said the first mate, Fred Roland, that evening; "those casks could not have moved of their own accord."

"But they may have rolled out of that open gangway there," said

the captain, pointing to the open place on the port side. "The pitching of the yacht upset them, you can rely upon it, and out they went."

The mate shook his curly head dubiously.

"There is another fact equally as strange," he continued, thoughtfully, "that is surprising. Ever since those casks disappeared the yacht has been going along at a snail's pace, despite the fact that every inch of canvas she can hold is raised apeak of the masts, and we have a spanking breeze that should send us along at sixteen knots an hour."

"This is a slow craft, Mr. Roland, mark me," said the captain, surlily.

"But, sir, I was told she would make eighteen knots——"

"Nonsense! Whoever told you was jibing. Don't bother your head any further about it, Mr. Roland, we are going along fast enough."

"Our orders were, you know, to keep sight of the Blizzard."

"I cannot help that," said Bilks, abruptly.

"And she sailed right away from us, and is not in sight," persisted Roland.

"Well, let her go; our following is no real necessity."

Roland was not convinced. He saw a strange look on the captain's face, and his mind was filled with misgivings. That night, while he was on watch, he stood in the stern pensively gazing into the sea, when a dark object caught his eyes, and with a smothered exclamation he drew his sheath knife, clambered over the taffrail, slid down a rope, until he swung just over the water beside the rudder. Reaching further over, he slid his knife down under the water, and the next moment the yacht bounded ahead with quadrupled speed. At the same instant the dark form of a man appeared above him peering over the stern. Then there sounded an ominous grating noise, the rope to which young Roland clung parted with a snap, and uttering a piercing cry he fell into the sea! The watch heard the cry, and as the young man sustained himself, the quartermaster brought the vessel up into the wind, and sent her off on a tack that brought her close by where Roland was swimming.

A rope was hurled over, he caught it, and a moment later he was hauled up on deck. He was a plucky young man, and was quite calm.

"How did it happen, Mr. Roland?" asked the captain, who first addressed him.

"It might have been by accident or design," he replied.

"What do you mean by 'design,' sir?"

They stood aft by the taffrail, and picking up the end of the rope which was tied to the railing, by which he had hung, he held up the parted end.

"This looks more as if some one had cut it than as if the strands parted," he said.

"It might have chafed against this nail," suggested Bilks.

"No, no," replied Roland. "It is too cleanly cut for that. Besides, I saw some one peering over at me as I hung down over the water."

"Ha!" exclaimed Bilks, gazing fiercely around. "Do you think some rascal had the brutality to try to murder you?"

"Such is my suspicion, sir."

"My God, this is too horrible, on my vessel! I thought I had an honest crew. Did you catch a view of this mysterious personage, Mr. Roland?"

"I did, sir, and very distinctly."

"I am glad to hear it, so that I can verify your suspicion. Describe him."

"The person I saw was certainly yourself, captain," said Roland, calmly.

"What!" roared Bilks. "Me!"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"You lie—confound you!"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Roland, whose eyes flashed dangerously. "I'll prove it. All the men except you and I wear round sailor hats, and blue shirts with white lanyards. You wear a white linen shirt and a straw hat. Therefore, I cannot be mistaken. But I do not accuse you of any evil intention."

"You had best not, sir!" exclaimed Bilks, threateningly. "Of course, your eyesight deceived you in your sudden terror. I am more strongly inclined to believe that the rope was cut on this nail in the railing."

"You do not ask me what I was suspended on the rope for."

"Ah, very true," said Bilks, with a poor grace. "It was a strange thing to do."

"Do you observe what excellent headway we are now making?"

All the sailors of the watch expressed extreme astonishment at it.

"This is very peculiar," said Bilks, in pretended surprise.

"Not at all," returned Fred, quietly. "I suspected that something more than common retarded the progress of this craft, and my idea was confirmed when I saw that some cunning rascal, who was prompted by an evil design of some kind, had lashed the missing water-casks together, stove in the tops, and with weights on them to sink them beneath the water, had fastened them to a ring-bolt in the rudder, and left them towing astern of us as a drag! It was to cut loose the hawser that held these casks to the Sea Angel that I went down that rope, which some one seems to have cut, out of maliciousness, upon seeing that I discovered the drag!"

As he said this he looked squarely into the eyes of the captain, and that individual quailed. That look cemented a feud between the first officer and the captain, and meant war to the end between them.

Of course Roland could not divine what the intention of the captain was in executing this plan to hold back the yacht from following the Blizzard, but that some mischief was afoot he had no doubt.

The next morning at sunrise they sighted a schooner, which was drifting about at the mercy of the waves. Approaching it and hauling to, Mr. Roland and four sailors put out to it, and found it quite deserted and in good condition. Going into the cabin, he saw a young girl lying in a berth fast asleep. When she was awakened she expressed such extreme delight that they were themselves filled with pleasure.

She told them that she had embarked from St. Augustine on this vessel after the death of her mother, a week previously, and was bound for New York in search of her guardian, Mr. Joseph Morgan. Her name was Jennie Holmes. The schooner, named the Foam King, met with rough weather and sprung a leak, when the crew abandoned her, forgetting the girl in their fear. The water swelled the seams of the vessel again, however, and although she did not sink, the poor girl was in constant dread that the next storm might send her to the bottom.

There was plenty to eat and drink on board, and she had only the hope of some passing vessel picking her up to cheer her in her loneliness.

The young and gallant mate brought her back to the yacht, and her story was repeated to the captain, who gave her nice quarters in the luxurious cabin. Bilks, who knew all about the scheme of Ralph Darrell, was transported with fiendish joy upon finding himself in possession of the young and handsome girl for whom the fortune had been designed, and he made up his mind that as long as he had her in his power she would not interfere with their plans.

The schooner was towed into a near-by port, and salvage was obtained in the amount of two thousand dollars, which was divided among the officers and men. As there was no means of going north from that port, according to the captain's eager representation, the girl at his urgent request remained on board, with the understanding that they were to transfer her to the first northward bound vessel they encountered. Then the sails were trimmed, and they continued down the coast again.

On the second day a terrific storm arose, and all the sails were housed. The waves rolled mountainously high, roaring and crashing and boiling and dashing the graceful little yacht hither and thither with giant force, while the scene was lit up by vivid flashes of lightning that darted across the murky black vault of Heaven, and the din of the raging water was augmented by the fearful rolling and rumbling of deafening thunder. Rain came down in drenching torrents, and wave after wave broke over the Sea Angel, making her strained timbers groan and creak, and the cordage snap frightfully. The fury of the storm increased momentarily, and the yacht, under bare masts, drove through the rack and mist like an atom in that mighty chaldron. The helmsman was lashed fast to the wheel, and only a couple of sailors clung to the life-lines woven across the deck. Roland and the captain were standing in the waist, keeping an anxious look over the storm, when suddenly a wave rolled in with a bellowing roar, it broke—something struck the captain and knocked him down, and with a cry of surprise the mate seized it and dragged it into the cabin, while the captain followed after him.

It was a young man, white, rigid, and lifeless!

There was an ugly stab wound in his bosom, and in his clenched hand was a letter. He was quite dead, and as the captain and the

mate gazed down at his still form, they wondered what strange freak of nature caused the briny deep to thus cast up its victims in this mysterious way.

CHAPTER II.

A MESSAGE FROM THE SEA.

THE captain and the mate stood mutely regarding the corpse of Edwin Hazleton for several moments, with the wind whistling through the rigging outside as the wild storm continued on, pitching the tiny craft about like a cockle-shell. Jennie had retired to her berth behind the curtains, and trembling with fear at the violence of the tempest, crouched under the covers. There was a bracket-lamp swung from the ceiling, shedding a dim glow throughout the small cabin.

"It passes the bounds of comprehension," said Fred, breaking the silence.

"What possessed you to drag him in here?" demanded Bilks.

"I thought he was alive."

"That was a strange supposition."

"Well, how did I know. Just look at his bosom; he has been stabbed, and the knife is yet in the wound."

"I wonder where he came from?" muttered Bilks, thoughtfully.

"Heaven only knows. Poor fellow, he is quite a boy in years."

"Well, Mr. Roland, as he is past recovery, you had better toss him overboard; corpses are unwelcome visitors here."

"I will search him first, and try to discover his identity."

"As you please," replied the captain, coldly, as he shrugged his shoulders; "you can continue your task alone, though, as I take no stock in it. Besides, we must weather this gale, and my presence is required out on deck, for our lives are in great peril at present."

"I will join you in a few moments, sir," replied Roland.

The captain said nothing, but left the cabin.

"This is a strange occurrence," thought the mate, as he stooped over the body. "He is evidently a victim of foul play. The look of horror in his starting eyes, and that knife in his heart, tell the tale of treachery. I will examine the knife first."

Seizing it by the haft, he drew it from its ghastly sheath, and a cry of surprise escaped him on seeing the following name engraven on it:

"RALPH DARRELL."

Fred knew that Darrell was one of the ship owners, and this evidence of his crime aroused the darkest suspicions in the young man's mind. He did not pause to speculate, however, but continued his search by emptying the murdered youth's pockets. Among its contents was the envelope containing the thousand dollars Mr. Morgan had given him, and a memorandum-book, both of which were water-soaked from their immersion in the sea. A glance over the contents of the memorandum-book showed Roland that the youth was named Edwin Hazleton, and that he had written a synopsis of the crimes of Morgan and Darrell up to the time of the departure of both vessels from New York. This information agitated Fred considerably when he recalled to mind that the girl they had picked up answered to the name of Jennie Holmes, and he had no doubt that it was she for whom the fortune was intended. The strange fatality of bringing the girl to the yacht, and the sea casting up the dead body of the emissary of the repentant rascal, Morgan, struck Roland as being so peculiar that he could only attribute it to the mysterious hand of God, who meant to make Roland the successor of the murdered youth in the accomplishment of the design to restitute the stolen fortune to its proper owner. Of course it was easy to assign this murder to Darrell now, as there was a powerful incentive for the mercenary wretch consummating the crime. As Fred was cogitating thus, his glance fell upon the letter clutched in the hand of Edwin, and he set about to gain possession of it. This was no easy task, as the fingers had stiffened over it with the expiring clutch of desperation. Nevertheless, by dint of hard work he finally got it, and saw that it was addressed to Mrs. Holmes in the well-known chirography of Mr. Morgan. It was the same letter which Darrell thought he had snatched from the breast pocket of his victim when he stabbed him. The rascal had, however, seized the wrong letter, as this one had been concealed in another pocket.

Fred did not open it, but with the resolve to carry out the project of Edwin as nearly as he could, he dried the three articles he had recovered on a cloth, carefully concealed them, and going to Jennie's berth, he asked her to dress and come out. She had formed a violent fancy for her handsome young rescuer, and wondering what he wanted, she complied with his request. She was startled on sight of the body, but

he explained the circumstances to her of how it came on board, and asked her if she recognized it.

She replied negatively, and then, as nothing further could be done, he put Darrell's knife in his pocket, and re-wrapping himself in his oil-skins, he lifted the body of poor Edwin in his arms, carried it out on deck, and let it fall into the raging sea, at the same time breathing a prayer of commendation to God for his soul.

All that night and for two succeeding days the storm raged with unabated violence, driving the Sea Angel many leagues out of her course. When it finally cleared away, the yacht looked as if it had rolled down the side of a mountain. There was scarcely any paint on her hull, every movable thing on deck was washed away, the cordage was broken in places, and a gaff-topmast was gone. With his quadrant and sextant the captain made an observation, and, making a rough calculation, he judged that they were then a few miles north of Walker's, the Double-breasted and Grand Keys, lying north of Lucaya, or Grand Abaco Island, the largest of the Bahamas. Consequently the storm must have driven them not only past their port of destination, but entirely out of the Gulf Stream, and far out past Florida.

It was a clear afternoon, and the sun shone down with all the heat of the tropics, and the sailors did all they could to repair the damage.

"All we can do now," said the captain, "is to run for the Bahamas, get our repairing done there and come back. We need a new spar."

"You might save much time by going further east, sir," replied Fred, who held a telescope in his hand. "I see a small wooded island off our starboard which we might make in a couple of hours."

"Excellent," replied Bilks. "I want to get back as soon as possible."

"To St. Augustine?"

"Yes. I want to see the captain of the Blizzard."

"Ah—you mean Mr. Darrell?"

"What!" cried Bilks, starting nervously. "How did you know——"

"Oh, I know all about it, sir."

"All about what?" demanded the other, with asperity.

It was Fred's intention to ascertain if the captain knew anything about the treachery of the ship owner, and, assuming a mysterious air, he replied:

"Oh, I saw him before we set sail, and he told me about the treasure."

Bilks looked at the young man in stupefaction.

"Is it possible?" he muttered.

"Oh, it was perfectly understood between him and me," continued Fred.

"What was understood?" asked Bilks, cautiously.

"Why, that affair about young Hazleton—the one who went on the Blizzard to—but what am I saying—you know nothing about it."

"Do you mean to tell me Mr. Darrell told you anything?"

"Certainly. He told me a good deal, sir."

"And what was that?"

"Oh, I am not to say anything until all is safe."

"Come—come! I may as well tell you, I am a confidant of Mr. Darrell."

"Then did you know that the cases of merchandise contained the gold, and that Mr. Darrell was going to prevent Mr. Morgan's returning it?"

"Of course I did. Why, blast you, didn't you say so before? If I had known that Darrell told you all, we might have avoided this trouble."

"How do you mean?"

"You certainly must have been crazy to cut adrift that drag."

"I don't understand you."

"Well, you know that I did it, don't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you think I did it for nothing?"

"That seems improbable. Explain yourself more clearly, sir."

"Why, it was agreed between Darrell and me that I was to delay this yacht until he got rid of the boy, and got his treasure safely landed. I was to have the yacht for my trouble. The lubbers of my crew are an honest gang, and if they suspected that I was up to any tricks, they would have mutinied and thrown me overboard."

"Well? And you meant something by this?"

"Certainly. This craft was to guard the other, and when we reached the harbor, the cases were to be transferred to our vessel for landing, to escape Darrell. Consequently, to thwart this, we were to be

delayed until the Blizzard made port, don't you see? Well, Darrell discharged the captain of the Blizzard, with full pay, just before she left New York, and substituted himself in order to get rid of the boy."

"Ah! I see."

"Thinking you were working for the boy, I attempted to drown you."

"Ha, ha, ha! what a blunder!" laughed Fred.

"Yes. You should have let me know sooner that you knew all about the affair, for, you see, I came near killing you."

"I am sorry now I cut the casks loose," said Fred, in regretful tones.

"Well, never mind now, the mischief is done. Just pass the word to head for that island now, and we will make our repairs and get back to St. Augustine as speedily as possible."

Saying which, the captain entered his cabin.

Fred's blood was boiling with indignation on hearing this man speak in such a cold-blooded manner of the villainy he was a party in, and it was with the utmost difficulty that he dissembled as adroitly as he had done in order to ascertain all that Bilks confessed. The more he thought of it the more convinced he was that fate had decreed that he should strive to defeat this rascality, for the strange manner in which he had gained his information of the whole affair was rather supernatural. He did not deem it advisable yet to say anything to Jennie about it, but he resolved to explain everything in due time. He had become fascinated by the charms of the young girl as much as she liked him, and it was fair to presume that if their intercourse continued at any length they would ultimately grow to love each other.

Issuing the captain's order to the quartermaster to head for the island, the booms soon swung around to leeward, the breeze filled the sails, and bending over on her beam ends, the Sea Angel went racing through the brine at a rapid rate of speed, and within a few hours, just as the sun went down on the edge of the sea, they went into a small lagoon, the anchor was heaved, and the captain and mate, with a couple of sailors, were rowed to the verdure-clad shore. It was an island about a mile in diameter, covered with tropical vegetation. The central part arose to a hill, and going over this, they saw another vessel anchored on the opposite side of the island. Very much surprised, they descended the hill, and approaching the vessel, their astonishment was increased by observing that it was the Blizzard. Evidently she, too, had been blown out of her course by the storm, and had put into the island for repairs. A cold sweat burst out all over Fred, for he realized that the moment Captain Bilks went aboard of the Blizzard and saw Darrell, he would discover the deception practiced upon him by his mate.

CHAPTER III.

THE DOUBLE VICTORY!

THE Blizzard was anchored off shore, and the place where Fred, the captain, and the two sailors stood viewing it was on a small plateau, a hundred yards from the shore.

"Well, well!" exclaimed Bilks, with a pleased expression on his face, "nothing could be more agreeable. We need not hurry at all now, for Darrell is no doubt on board, and I can conclude my portion of the contract with him within an hour!"

"Oh, no, you won't," exclaimed Fred, coolly.

"What in thunder do you mean by that?" demanded Bilks, in surprise.

"Simply what I said. You shall *not* see Darrell!"

"Confound your impudence," commenced the captain, angrily.

"Men!" said Fred, to the two astonished sailors, "this man is an accessory to a most foul murder, and is also implicated in a plot to rob the young castaway on the yacht out of a fortune. The captain of the Blizzard is his accomplice. Seize him before he does any further injury. If he once meets Darrell, you will all be ill-treated."

"Ay, sir," replied the sailors. "Ef so be as that's the case, we'll hold 'im!"

They sprung toward Bilks, but he, white with rage, and realizing in an instant that Fred had duped him, drew a pistol from his pocket, aimed it at the sailors, fired, and turning like lightning, he ran toward the bark. With a cry of agony one of the sailors staggered back, wounded in the breast, and profiting by their consternation the captain fled like a deer. The unharmed sailor caught his messmate in his arms, staunching the flow of blood, while Fred, recovering from his surprise, ran after Bilks. The captain had almost reached the shore

by that time, however, and then sprung into the water and struck out for the Blizzard. Fred was filled with apprehension, for he knew that if Bilks once reached the bark and told Darrell that he knew of their scoundrelism, and that Jennie was on aboard of the Sea Angel, the rascals would spare no efforts to gain possession of the girl, the yacht, and himself before they could get back to civilization and make their crime public.

"Stop!" he cried, pausing on the edge of the surf curling in on the beach, and he picked up the revolver from the sand where Bilks had tossed it. "Stop and come back, or I'll shoot you!"

Bilks vouchsafed no answer, but kept steadily on.

Bang! went the pistol a moment later.

The captain dived, and looking toward the bark, Fred was dismayed to see the watch on deck run over to the lee side and gaze at him.

"There is no help for it," he muttered, desperately. "I must stop him."

Springing into the water, he struck out for the captain, and by the time Bilks was half way to the bark Fred was upon him, as he was an expert swimmer. Seizing the captain in his arms, he made a clutch at his throat; but he was too late, for the captain uttered a cry:

"Help, help! Ahoy, there, Darrell! It is I—Bilks!"

"Hello!" shouted some one from the deck. "What's the matter?"

"Help! save me!" yelled Bilks.

"Lower away that boat in the stern!" cried the voice of Darrell.

"Ha! I have you now!" exclaimed Fred, excitedly.

"Let me go!" gurgled the other, in choking accents.

"Never! I will strangle you first."

"Help! For God's sake save me, Darrell!" faintly cried the struggling captain.

Fred pulled him over and was dragging him toward the shore, when unfortunately a boat filled with half a dozen sailors and Ralph Darrell reached the surface of the water and was pulled toward the two struggling men. Fred gazed at them in despair, and was obliged to relax his grip on Bilks and swim hastily for the shore to save himself.

On gaining the embankment he saw them pull the half-dead captain into the quarter-boat, and then they came on toward the shore.

The aspect of affairs was becoming serious to Fred, and he ran back to the two sailors. The wounded man was standing up.

"Well, sir?" said the other, querulously.

"He escaped me. How is Tom?"

"I've got over a faint spell, sir."

"That is good. We must hurry right back to the yacht."

"Any trouble in the wind, sir?"

"Plenty. A boat load of Darrell's cut-throats are coming ashore for us."

"Do they mean any harm?"

"They may kill us."

"Dash me now, that looks bad. What's the trouble?"

Fred told them, as they hurried back to the Sea Angel.

Looking back, they saw that Darrell and the boat's crew were following them with Captain Bilks. Upon reaching the yacht, Fred informed all hands all that occurred to Edwin Hazleton and all subsequent events, including the captain's complicity, and said in conclusion, "We must resist them, or they will murder every one of us."

"We'll stand by you, sir," said an old salt, determinedly.

"Ay, ay, hooray for Captain Roland!" cried the rest, enthusiastically. Fred appointed one of the men first officer, and they all armed themselves, and going ashore, after locking Jennie in the cabin, they prepared an ambush and awaited the coming of their enemies in silence. Presently a number of dark shadowy forms came through the tangled vines and bushes, when at the word of command from Fred the ambushed yachtsmen let drive a volley that demoralized the others, and they turned and fled with cries of terror. The sailors quickly reloaded their weapons, and uttering a ringing cheer they pursued their flying enemies, and assailing them before they had gone far, a desperate combat ensued, which finally resulted in the defeat and capture of the whole party of barkmen. Elated over this unsanguinary triumph, Fred ordered all their prisoners bound hand and foot, and had them conveyed on board of the yacht. There were twelve in all, which left about eight men on the Blizzard, and these the novice captain resolved to capture, if possible, when he foresaw that he could gain possession of the treasure.

Darkness soon fell, and seeing that all his men were armed, they set off across the island, and soon reached the other side.

Darrell's boat was drawn up out of the surf, and embarking his men in it after getting it through the low breakers, they silently rowed out toward the dark, shadowy outlines of the bark as it lay at anchor, every rise and fall of the surging inland swell making the chain cables groan and creak.

"Boat ahoy!" cried a voice from the deck, as they drew near the ship.

"Ahoy!" responded Fred, in muffled tones.

"Is that the captain?"

"Ay! Toss me a line over the stern."

"Ay—ay, sir."

"Run her close under the lee," whispered Fred, and the boat turned just as a rope came whizzing over their heads, which was made fast to the painter, and a moment later they went up a rope ladder to the deck, encountering a couple of men, and they perceiving that the new-comers were strangers, they ran down into the waist.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Fred.

"Who are you?—we don't know you."

"From the Sea Angel," replied Fred.

"Ah! Then you——"

But before they could finish speaking they were overpowered and bound.

"Where are your companions?" asked Fred of one of them.

Instead of replying the men set up a terrific yelling that brought the others up from the fore-castle, and then the two gave them warning to resist the new-comers, who were their enemies. There was a large gun mounted on a carriage abaft of the foremast, and the six remaining barkmen quickly ran to it and turned it on the yachtsmen.

"Leave this vessel!" exclaimed the man who manned the gun, "or we will blow you all to pieces. We will gi' ye jest two minutes!"

"Down behind the water casks, men!" whispered Fred, excitedly.

The next moment there came a thunderous roar, a blaze of fire and smoke, and they heard the flying grape go screaming over their heads. They did not give the others an opportunity to reload, but springing up, they rushed upon them in a body, and after a short, sharp struggle they managed to make them prisoners. It was fortunate that Darrell's forces were divided, for had they all opposed the yachtsmen our friends would have fared badly. Confining his bound prisoners down in the fore-castle, the anchor was brought up to the catheads, the yards squared away, and the bark was headed around the island for the lagoon. About one hour was spent making the detour, and when the bark entered a dismaying sight met their view that filled them with dread.

The yacht was gone!

"Good Heaven!" exclaimed Fred, aghast. "Could they have escaped?"

"They must a' got free by some means, sir," replied a sailor.

"And poor Jennie was locked in the cabin!"

"They won't hurt her, will they?"

"They wish to murder her for the fortune in this bark."

"That is a bad outlook," said the sailor, gravely.

"We must pursue them, and get possession of the yacht again," cried Fred, and issuing orders to raise sails, they glided out on the sea again.

CHAPTER IV.

SCUTTLED.

It was a dark night, and when the Blizzard got out on the open sea the sailors could not see their hands before their faces.

Fred was in despair, for he realized that he could do nothing in the thick darkness, as the yacht would not be likely to show lights, and it would be useless to beat about all night, with little or no chance of meeting with the missing yacht. About midnight a thrilling cry rung through the ship that startled every one.

Fred was sitting in the cabin when that cry was heard, and he sprung to his feet just as the door was burst open, and one of his men rushed in, his face pale, his eyes starting, and breathless from excitement.

"What is the matter?" asked Fred, in sharp tones of alarm.

"Oh, sir, it are awful!"

"Speak!"

"The wessel are sinking!"

"The bark sinking?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"You are jesting."

"No, sir. I says az this wessel is a-goin' down fast."

"How do you know?"

"I was jist down in the fo'cas'le——"

"Well?"

"An' I seen one o' them lubbers of Lascars wot we tied kneelin' on ther floor, wi' a auger in his 'and, a-borin' 'oles in the floor."

"What!"

"All on 'em was free——"

"Free?"

"Ay, sir. 'E must 'a' slipped out o' his fastenin's, freed ther others, an' findin' the auger, tried to scuttle the ship."

"What did you do? Speak faster!"

"The minit I seen what 'e was a-doin', I runs up on deck, an' they chases me. But I got the start o' 'em an' slammed the door o' ther companion-way shut, an' bolted it, catchin' them in their own trap. They'll all be drowned in there wi' no chance o' escape."

"Were there many holes in the floor?"

"At least forty."

"Then they could not plug them up in time to save themselves by preventing more water entering the ship, could they?"

"No. The fore-castle had two feet o' water on the floor."

"That is bad. Pass the word to the quartermaster to return to the island."

"It can't be did."

"Why?"

"It's so dark out you can't see nuthin'."

"Dreadful! Oh, why did I not ascertain our position. We might then have steered by the compass, and reached shore before the ship goes down."

He rushed out on deck, followed by the sailor.

"Who uttered that cry which I heard before?" he asked.

"The men in the fore-castle, when I locked the door on 'em."

"Let every lamp and lantern on board be lighted."

"Why, sir, that will expose us to Mr. Darrell," said the sailor.

"I cannot help that; we must run the risk of a fight in order to save our lives. Pass the word to head north by east; it is a faint chance."

All the sailors were hurrying hither and thither on the deck in dread of the impending calamity, and the helmsman spun around his wheel, and brought the bark around on a new tack in conformity with Fred's order. The young captain approached the quartermaster.

"How is she going?" he asked.

"Sluggish, sir."

"Tom!" he cried to one of the men. "Get the line and make soundings."

"Ay, ay, sir," was the cheery reply.

In a few minutes the plumb and line went over the side, and the sounders called out the fathoms, others meantime lighting all the lanterns, while from the companionway the wild cries of the imprisoned men grew more frantic every moment. The bark was slowly but surely settling, and they all heard the gurgling of the water down the fore-castle as it continued to pour in. In another half hour the bark would be beneath the water. The soundings showed ten fathoms, by which Fred deducted that they must be far from the island. The boats were all prepared for launching at an instant's notice, well provisioned, and a tackle was hastily rigged over the hatchway, and all the treasure cases were hoisted up on deck, Fred going down into the half submerged hold with a lantern, and pointing them out to the men by the mark G, with which each was made distinguishable from the rest of the merchandise. It was his intention to try to save the treasure by having it placed on a raft; but by the time they finally got the cases up on deck, he saw that they would not have time to build a raft before the bark would founder.

At this moment of bitter disappointment the sounders called out six fathoms, five, four, eight, three, and then they heard an unmistakable roar, at first faint and gradually growing louder each moment, and they knew that it was made by the breakers on the shore of the island. A cheer arose to the dark skies.

"What shall I do, sir?" asked the quartermaster, dubiously. "It will be impossible to find the lagoon in this darkness."

"There is nothing for it but to beach her."

"She may go to pieces."

"That is true, but if we can run her in shallow water we will have a chance to get ashore, and take the treasure off of her."

At this moment the bark gave a frightful lurch to leeward, then righting herself, she rolled from side to side.

"I fear she is going down," exclaimed the quartermaster.

"You are mistaken. Didn't you hear that grating noise?"

"Ay, sir."

"Well, we are grazing the top of a sand bar; the tide must be high if the water covers the bar. Consequently, we may hope to be left high and dry when the tide recedes, if we once get her stranded."

The bark now went on, and they all knew that the shore was close at hand by the loudness of the noise of the surf. Suddenly they were caught in the strong current that swept inland, the bark was caught on the crest of a high in-rolling wave, and with a roar that frightened them all they were hurled in and struck!

A howl of terror went up from those confined in the fore-castle, there was a grinding, splitting noise as the bows were stove in, and everything on deck went crashing over into the sea, the mainmast falling across the deck, tearing the cordage, and splitting the foremast in two.

Several of the sailors received numberless cuts and bruises, and one of them was struck by the fallen mast and knocked into the sea.

The bark immediately rolled over on one side, and there she lay with the surf beating about her smashed hull, a total wreck!

Under Fred's orders, a couple of sailors went ashore in one of the boats, and found that they were within four fathoms of the beach. Collecting a huge heap of drift-wood and twigs on the sand, they ignited the pile, and soon a huge, lurid blaze shot up to the sky, showing them their position. Had they continued down the beach a few hundred feet, they would have entered the lagoon again. The sailors then went back to the ship, and the watches were set, and the dreary night dawdled by slowly enough, the men making themselves as comfortable as possible. When day broke the dark sky opened, and rain poured down in torrents.

Nevertheless, Fred set the men to work as soon as possible, and they landed the treasure, all the arms, provisions, clothing, and everything else needful to their comfort, and one of the men finding a natural cavern on the edge of the lagoon, in the base of a small bush-covered cliff, they concealed the treasure there.

The following night the tempest increased, and when it cleared away, after two days, not a vestige was left of the wrecked *Blizzard* save the debris cast ashore by the surf. The prisoners in the fore-castle had been securely bound again, and were confined in one of the half dozen tents which the sailors had extemporized from the sails of the bark, and a sailor constantly guarded them with a loaded musket, threatening to blow the brains out of the first who attempted to escape.

Toward nightfall of the third day, as the sailors were sitting around their camp-fires, discussing the best means of getting away from the island, a forlorn-looking wretch, with scarcely any clothing on his dark body, was brought into camp by one of the men whose duty it was to stand guard up on the bluff, and they instantly recognized him as being one of the *Lascars* whom they had confined on the *Sea Angel*.

"Why, Tompkins," said Fred, in surprise, "where did you find him?"

"He war wanderin' aroun' eatin' some oranges wot he hed picked," replied the sailor, "when I caught 'im."

"See here, my fine fellow," said Fred to the man, "where is the yacht?"

"She wreck, sah, an' alla mens dey is drown."

"Impossible!" cried Fred, in dismay.

"Shuah, sar," returned the *Lascar*, seriously.

"And are you the only one who reached shore alive?"

"Me de only one, sah."

"How did Darrell steal the craft?"

"One man's he git free an' maka de odders so."

"And the young girl?"

"She go down wid de wreck."

"You are lying!" said Fred, with a groan he could not suppress.

"No, sah; dat's de trufe. She wreck on one reefs outside de same night."

"Can you prove your assertion?"

"I show you de timbers on de sand."

"Where did she go down?"

"Ober dere, to de sou'ard."

"And every one perished but you?"

The man nodded assentingly.

"Were any of the bodies washed ashore?"

"On'y de womin, sah."

"Ah! And where is her body?"

"I hab it in one water cavern."

"You put it in a water cavern, eh? Can you show it to me?"

"Come along, sah."

"Very well. I will go with you, but if there is any treachery here, you will suffer for it, as I will not hesitate to use my knife on you."

"All right, sah."

"Tom," said Fred, "you come with me, and, Will Buntline, you can assume charge of the camp. If we do not return in a couple of hours, follow our trail, which you can clearly see in the moist ground, and be sure to arm yourselves, for we will return if no accident or design befalls us, in the time mentioned. Now, *Lascar*?"

"Ay, sah."

"Lead the way. Is it far from here?"

"De cave? Dat am on de west'ard, facin' de sea."

"You allude to those low cliffs, I suppose?"

"Dey are de on'y ones ober dere on dat side o' de island, sah."

Following the *Lascar*, they left the camp,

He trudged ahead of them silently and stoically.

They took a path skirting the sea-shore, and as there was a full moon in the starry sky, objects were as visible as by day. Ten minutes' walk brought them to the heights abutting the sea, and the *Lascar* unhesitatingly descended an anfractuous path between a heap of huge rocks that wound gradually downward to a projecting strip that merged out into the water where it was comparatively calm and unruffled. The rocks were beetling on the crag, and tumbled down in wild, picturesque confusion, leaving wide openings into which washed the tide. At certain hours, as was evinced by the moss and sea-weed high upon these rocks, when the tide was at flood, it submerged the lower rocks, which were now exposed in consequence of the tide being at ebb. The fissures that split the crags radiated in wide seams in all directions.

"Where is the cave?" asked Fred, as the *Lascar* paused on the shore, and stooping over, drew a huge log from beneath some bushes growing over the water.

"Roun' on de face ob de cliff," replied the black, throwing the log upon the grass.

"How can we enter it?"

"Only by wading. You follow me."

They wore no shoes, and stepped into the shallow water, and walked around to the rocks mentioned, and plunged under a large boulder that looked as if about to fall momentarily into a dark opening. They followed him, and found themselves in Stygian darkness. They could stand upright and not feel the roof over their heads. The cavern, therefore, must have been spacious.

"Well, *Lascar*?" exclaimed Fred.

"Hark, sir," said Tom, warningly. "Do ye hear that noise?"

"He is running away. I say—— Oh, God! what is that?"

They heard a crash the next instant, and turning around, they saw the huge boulder over the opening drop down, barring their exit.

And at the same time they heard the receding tones of the wily *Lascar* in a fiendish cachinnation as he left them to their fate.

CHAPTER V.

ENTOMBED ALIVE.

FRED and Tom were horrified at the peril into which the treacherous *Lascar* had drawn them. The water cavern was half full of brine, and they knew that when the tide rose the whole place would be submerged, in which case they would miserably perish like rats in a trap. At first the interior of the place was as dark as Egypt to them, coming as they did from the moonlight outside; but looking up, they saw that the roof of the cavern was split in places, allowing a few feeble rays of moonlight to penetrate the gloomy interior. As the moments passed they became more accustomed to the semi-darkness, and were able to define their surroundings. They saw that the tide was rising steadily, filling the cavern. It was a large place, with broad apertures in the walls. In the center was a deep pool, and in it several sharks were swimming about with nervous motions, evidently uneasy at their imprisonment, their black dorsol-fins cutting the surface of the water like knives. After a few moments of silence Fred spoke in gloomy tones:

"We will perhaps die here, Tom."

"Ay, sir. We've run afoul of bad luck again."

"Do you think we could move that rock?"

"No, sir. It weighs at least two tons, an' is firmly wedged in."

"That Lascar did not do this for nothing, I am thinking."

"Do you think as he was alone in the job?"

"No. My impression is that he lied about the Sea Angel going down."

"Ah! Then the rest o' the crew o' the yacht must be on the island?"

"Exactly. It looks as if our enemies sent the cunning fellow to do this. Buntline did not find him by accident at all; he strayed into camp by design, with his plausible story to gull us fully rehearsed, and with the plan to entrap us fully made up."

"What could they gain by it, sir? The treasure is hidden safe 'nough."

"That was a good stroke of luck for us."

"Hark!" suddenly exclaimed Tom, warningly.

"Hullo! Hullo!" cried a muffled voice.

They gazed around in astonishment without seeing any one.

"Who could it have been?" whispered Fred, in perplexity.

"It sounded like Mr. Darrell's voice," replied Tom, uneasily.

"Hullo, down there!" interposed the strange voice again.

Simultaneously both looked upward, and saw the grinning face of Darrell peering down at them through one of the openings in the roof.

"It is him!" ejaculated Fred, in dismay.

"Ay, now," replied the sailor; "the lubber did it after all."

"Well, my hearties," chuckled the gloating wretch, "how do you like your quarters, eh? Rather a dangerous hole to be in, isn't it?"

"You miserable rascal!" retorted Fred, bitterly, "it would be different if you accorded us an even chance. You only gained this supremacy by trickery of the basest kind. Ah, would that I had you in my clutches!"

"But you see you haven't," chuckled the other, exasperatingly, "nor will you ever have that opportunity. The tide is rising, and in an hour or two the cavern will be filled. If you agree to my terms I will liberate you; refuse, and at the end of two hours both of you will be dead."

"I shall agree to nothing with you," retorted Fred, angrily.

"As you please. I thought you valued your hide much higher."

"Life is dear, but pride is most supreme in this case," said Fred, dryly.

"How high a spirit the boy possesses!" said Darrell, with mock gravity.

"Ay," said Fred. "It will sustain my courage against you."

"I hope not. The favor I would ask is not great, and I think my honest Lascar's excellent work will force you to terms."

"Not at all," returned Fred, coldly.

"We shall see. All I ask of you is to tell me where you have hidden that treasure. You see I know most all that you have been doing since the unlucky Blizzard went ashore a few days ago."

"Ah! your emissaries have been watching us?" said Fred, involuntarily.

"Certainly. The yacht only left the lagoon she was anchored in to enter another further down the coast, where we have been lying ever since in security and living like kings. But to return to my former question. Jennie is in my power, and if you do not accede to my proposal I shall certainly cut off her head and feed the fishes with her body."

"Unmitigated villain!" groaned Fred.

"Will you do as I say?"

"Never! Do your worst. We will all be killed anyhow by your ruffianly horde of cut-throats, even if we do deliver up to you this treasure."

"Oh, dear, how little confidence you have in our honesty of purpose."

"My mistrust has good foundation."

"How sorry I am, to be sure. Are you fully decided to say nothing?"

"Yes. I prefer to die this way than give you any satisfaction."

"Very well, my boy, do just exactly as you please. I am going now, and I will return when the tide flows out again to pitch your dead bodies into the sea. Your perversity is really lamentable. Farewell, then."

His face disappeared from the opening the next moment.

"Did I express your sentiments, Tom?" asked Fred, pressing the old sailor's hand.

"Ay, sir," he replied, emotionally. "You are my captain, and I will stand by my articles to stick to you as long as the Almighty spares my life."

"True devotion," murmured the young man, feelingly.

They sat down on a projecting rock in silence after this, and despondingly listened to the murmuring of the inflowing water, and watched it rise up, up, up, inch by inch, until it lapped at their feet, and then, with shudders, they drew further back, counting the minutes as they passed and calculating how long it would be before they were floating in the treacherous flood, two stiffened corpses.

"Captain Roland!"

"Eh?" exclaimed Fred, starting from his gloomy reverie. "Did you speak, Tom?"

"Me? No."

"Captain Roland!" said the voice again, in cautious tones.

Both looked up at the opening over their heads, expecting to see Darrell again, but no one was there, and they gazed blankly at each other.

"See here!" cried the voice, in a louder tone. "Look up."

Looking across the pool of water, high up on the face of the wall opposite where they sat, they saw an opening in the wall, and in this aperture, which was large enough to admit the passage of a human body, was a man's face.

"Nick Wildroe!" they both cried, in a burst of surprise.

"Ay, sir!" he replied, cheerily. "Alive and well."

"Why," said Fred, "we thought you perished when the Blizzard was wrecked, and the falling mast knocked you into the sea."

"But you can see, sir, that you made a mistake."

"By what good fortune were you saved, Nick?"

"I was washed ashore, and then recovered my senses. But it was only to find myself surrounded by some of the barkmen. They made a prisoner of me, carried me to the yacht, and confined me in the hold. This afternoon, when all had gone ashore but my guard, I managed to strangle him half to death, and liberating Miss Jennie, we both made our escape. We saw some of the men, and, running down here to the sea shore, we got into this water cave. Here we have heard and witnessed all that has passed. If you want to get out of there, come around here, and get up through this opening. This cave is higher above the water line than that one, and you will be comparatively safe in here."

The joy of the two may be imagined at this fortunate chance of deliverance.

But upon looking across the water, they saw that it lapped at the base of that side of the cavern's walls, and the only way in which they could get over there was by swimming. This was not a comforting thought, inasmuch as the pool, as said before, was full of sharks.

"Well, Tom," said the young captain, "shall we risk it?"

"I see no other way, sir."

"Ah, what is this?" said Fred, stooping over the water.

"A log, sir."

"Why, yes. It is the same one the Lascar drew up on the grass. Evidently he used it to get around to the face of this cliff from the shore when the tide was up, and it must have rolled down the sloping embankment when he drew it, and falling into the water, has floated in here through an opening."

"Can we use it?"

"Of course. Stand on it, and paddle yourself over with your hands, and you can escape those ocean bloodhounds. When you reach the other side, try to cling to the wall, and shove it over here for me."

The overjoyed Tom got on the log, as directed, and in a few moments he reached the opposite wall. Nick let down his pea-jacket, and the old sailor held on to a sleeve, and gave the log a shove that sent it back to Fred. He then easily clambered up to the opening, and went through, the weight of his body, though, straining the sleeve of Nick's coat fearfully. Fred quickly secured the log and passed over the sharks. One made a spiteful snap at the log, that oscillated it so much that for a moment he feared he would lose his balance and fall into their very maws; but he continued on slowly, without accident, and presently reached the other side. Nick let down the coat again, and as the log drifted away, Fred grasped the sleeve and began his ascent up the face of the wall toward the opening. He had gained

half the distance, and was just reaching out to grasp Nick's hand, when with an ominous snap the sleeve of the coat parted from the body, as it had already been strained by the weight of Tom, and losing his balance, the next moment Fred fell backward, and dropped into the pool, in the very midst of the ravenous sharks he had been so careful to avoid!

CHAPTER VI. THE MAN-EATER.

WHEN Fred struck the water the sharks scattered in affright, and this momentary respite gave the young man time to collect his faculties and draw his sheath-knife with which to defend himself if necessary. He was not kept long in doubt, for as he turned to swim back to the wall he heard a swashing sound behind him, and looking back over his shoulder, he saw a black fin cleaving the surface of the water with the rapidity of lightning directly in his wake.

Pausing and treading water, he took his knife from between his teeth, where he had placed it, and awaited the attack.

When the shark arrived within arm's length it turned over on its back, showing its white belly uppermost, and darted toward him. At the same juncture he dove athwart its course, and just as its huge mouth snapped together the heels of his shoes grazed by its head, and he passed within an inch of losing both of his feet. Had he delayed an instant his life must have paid the forfeit. As it was, he went down and came up again directly beneath the enormous body. Shoving his hand forward with the knife tightly clutched, he gashed open the body of the leviathan, and the next moment the water became dyed crimson with its blood. In excessive agony it lashed to and fro, and Fred came up to the surface and strove to swim out of its way. Unfortunately, its small, sparkling eyes were fastened upon him, and it made a rush toward him again, no doubt recognizing him as the author of its misery, and bent upon avenging itself.

The young man strove to get out of its way, but unfortunately his legs became entangled in a mass of seaweed, and he could not move any faster than if he had been weighted. On came the infuriated shark, its eyes glaring like balls of fire in the obscurity, and Fred gave himself up for lost, when suddenly Nick let drive a large bit of rock, and so precisely was it thrown that it struck the man-eater with force enough to drive it down a dozen feet beneath the surface.

But, although Fred knew that he would have time to gain the wall, he saw the other sharks darting toward him with alarming rapidity.

They had been attracted by their keen scent of the blood flowing from the wound Fred had inflicted upon the other. Three of them started at him from different directions, and he let himself sink like a shot, straight down to the bottom. As the three came together they found their wounded member in their midst, and at once set about to devour it, with all the voracity of cannibals. Taking advantage of their pre-occupation, Fred darted up again, and swam for his life. It took but a moment for him to reach the wall again, and grasp the body of Nick's coat.

He was half exhausted, and hardly had strength enough left to hold on to the coat while Tom and Nick drew him up to the opening.

It did not take him long to get through the aperture, and once in the other cavern, he was overjoyed to take Jennie's little hand in his own and tell her how glad he was that she had escaped her enemies.

After they had rested awhile Fred arose.

"I am going back to the camp," he said.

"Oh, Mr. Roland," said the girl, "let me dissuade you from such madness."

"Madness?" he echoed in surprise.

"Why, certainly. The barkmen have gone there to capture your men."

"All the more reason why I should go to their assistance."

"No—no! They might kill you if they once catch you."

"But I shall not let them do that," he replied, smilingly.

"Ah, you cannot tell; they are a bad lot of men."

"How did they treat you?" he asked.

"I suffered nothing. Mr. Darrell kept me locked in the cabin, and never spoke to me except when he fetched me my meals."

"Ah, he made himself your jailer?"

"Yes. The worst indignity I suffered was his repeated and incessant proposals of marriage to me, all of which I scornfully rejected."

"Ah, he wanted to marry you?"

"Such he claimed to be his intention, if I consented."

"Did he say anything to you about your fortune?"

"I told him that he only wanted me as a medium to secure it."

"And then?"

"The odious wretch smiled blandly, and assured me that I guessed his design."

"He is as impudent as he is desperate. By the way, I have got a letter for you concealed on board of the yacht."

"A letter for me?"

"A message from the dead."

"That is a singular expression, Mr. Roland."

"Strange as it seems, it is, nevertheless, literally true."

"And who wrote it?"

"Mr. Morgan intrusted this letter to Edwin Hazleton, whom Darrell murdered and tossed into the ocean. The body of Hazleton was cast up by the tempestuous sea on the deck of the Sea Angel, and I found the letter clutched tightly in the hand of the murdered youth."

"How strange!" she murmured.

"Decidedly so. It was plainly one of the mysterious plans of that invisible agency of the Divine Power, known as Providence. God had intervened his power to defeat the villainy of our mutual enemy."

"Hush!" suddenly exclaimed Nick, holding up his hand.

He walked quietly to the entrance of the cavern, and peering out, he suddenly evinced some great excitement, and beckoned them to approach.

This they did, and looking out, they saw four of the bark's sailors in a row-boat, which contained the eight remaining sailors of the yacht, who were bound hand and foot.

"Hold hard!" said one of them as they arrived opposite the cave entrance, and the others rested on their oars. "This will do, boys. Captain Darrell told us to drop them into the sea, but I don't exactly like this work. There is another water cavern, and I think we had better leave them in there, and free one of them, first making them promise to remain secluded until the yacht leaves this island. This will at least give them one chance in a hundred, and leave our consciences clearer."

"Ay, what Rawlins says is right."

"We'll do as he says."

"I am agreeable," was what the others said, and giving away, their oars dipped and rose, and the boat shot toward the cavern.

"What'll we do, sir?" asked Tom, turning to his commander.

"We must fall upon them the moment they enter. There are four against us three, but by taking them unawares, we can overpower them without resorting to the use of arms, of which, I see, Nick is deficient."

"Here they come!" whispered Jennie.

"All right. You go back out of our way, Jennie."

And as the girl retreated to the extremity of the place, Fred crossed to the other side of the mouth of the cavern, and they awaited their prospective victims.

On came the barkmen, they run the boat ashore, sprang out, and each one of them grasped a bound prisoner in his arms, and they filed into the cave. As the first entered, Fred seized him, Nick caught the next, and Tom the other. The surprise was so complete as to frighten the superstitious sailors, and our friends had no difficulty in mastering them, as they were rendered helpless by the shock of surprise.

Having secured them, they caught the remaining man, who had become alarmed at the sounds he heard, dropped his burden and had sprung into the boat, and was trying to get away. They then unbound their friends, and Fred addressed himself to Buntline:

"How in the world did they capture you?"

"We had no idea that they were coming after you were gone, and being unarmed, they had an easy time of it. They liberated the men we had in the tent, and giving orders for these fellows to drown us, they seized upon everything we had saved from the wreck, carried them to the yacht, and the majority of them are now searching for the treasure."

"Why did Darrell order the men to drown you?"

"Simply because we all refused to divulge the secret of the treasure-trove."

"Good boys! Have you any idea how many there are on the yacht?"

"Only four or five."

"Then we must endeavor to gain possession of her at once."

"Hurrah!" cried all the men, in delight.

"You are brave fellows!" exclaimed Fred. "Come on!"

They left the cavern, entered the boat, and carrying their four prisoners with them, they rowed around the island to the lagoon, and boldly approached the yacht. There were a couple of men on deck, and upon seeing them one of the men ran into the cabin.

It took the yachtsmen only a moment to clamber up on deck, and they rushed upon the man, who proved to be the same Lascar who had inveigled Fred and Tom into the water cave, and after a momentary struggle they knocked him down and bound him. Then they rushed toward the cabin after the others, when the door was thrown open, and, to their dismay, almost every one of the crew of the *Blizzard*, among whom were Darrell and Bilks, filed out on deck, and covered the yachtsmen with a dark array of muskets.

"Fury!" exclaimed Fred, in startled tones, "we are trapped."

"So you are, my hearty—so you are," said Darrell, smilingly; "and not only have we got you fellows and the girl, but we have found the treasure in the cave beside the lagoon, and it is now safely stowed away in the hold. Hold up your hands, every one, and surrender, now, or, by heavens, you will all die like dogs!"

CHAPTER VII.

OVER THE ROLLING SEA.

FRED was exasperated to think how blindly they had walked into the lion's jaws. They were helpless with the grim muzzles of those muskets threatening all their lives. Instead of attacking the yacht and gaining an easy victory, they found themselves suddenly made prisoners; and not only that calamity, but learned from the sneering mouth of Ralph Darrell that they had secured the treasure. There was no sense in resisting, placed as they were in so critical a position, therefore:

"Hold up your hands, my men," said Fred, setting the example.

"Good," commented Darrell, with gleaming eyes. "You are sensible."

He made a motion, and the sailors and Fred were bound, and their confederates in the row-boat were again put at liberty.

Darrell gave his men orders to carry the sailors down into the hold, and secure them so that there would be no possibility of their escape, and then telling Fred and Jennie to follow him, he went into the cabin.

They were preceded by Captain Bilks, who scowled at Fred darkly.

"Sit down on those camp-stools," said Darrell, curtly, when they had entered.

The girl and the young man complied silently.

"Now," continued the ship-owner, gazing fixedly at the youth, "I want you to tell me precisely how you came by your information of what transpired from the time Edwin Hazleton left the house of Mr. Joseph Morgan up to the time of your communicating to Captain Bilks your knowledge of certain events that occurred subsequent to Hazleton's embarkation on board of the *Blizzard*."

"I refuse to fully satisfy you on those points," said Fred, doggedly.

"Ha! That is a bad commencement, my boy!"

"You cannot force me speak if I do not wish to."

"Certainly not. Nor will I try, as I have had one example of your ridiculous obstinacy. Yet, as your fate looks rather gloomy at present, I thought I would have humanity enough to give you a slight chance to ameliorate it by an open confession."

"I suppose you have yet designs upon my life?"

Darrell shrugged his shoulders and smiled blandly.

"You may imagine anything," he said.

"Why do you want that information?"

"To satisfy my mind on a certain point at issue."

"And that is——"

"To know just how public the affair became."

"So! You imagine, no doubt, that I am a confidant of Hazleton's?"

"That seemed impossible to, me as I had him watched from the time he left Morgan's house up to the time he embarked on the *Blizzard*. I am simply mystified at your knowledge, that is all."

"You may well be."

"May I ask why?"

"Because I am an agent Providence decreed should baffle you."

Darrell burst out laughing immoderately.

"Superstition!" he commented scornfully.

"I am not superstitious," said Fred quietly.

The ship-owner laughed again, and at this moment one of the officers entered.

"Well, Mr. Benson," he asked, "is everything on board?"

"Yes, sir. We are ready to sail."

"Have you taken on fresh water and fruit, completed the new gaff topmast, finished painting the hull, and put the yacht in good trim?"

"Everything has been done, sir."

"Then bend the sails at once, and leave this accursed island as far in your wake as possible in the shortest space of time it can be done in."

"Ay, sir. I will man the wheel myself," said Benson, saluting and retiring.

"Now, Roland, to resume our conversation," said Darrell, turning to the young man.

"I told you I was not superstitious."

"So you did. You claim, though, to be an agent of Providence."

"Precisely."

"Will you be good enough to explain how?"

"The body of your victim was cast up by the sea."

"Cast up?" exclaimed the other, perturbedly.

"Yes, sir; thrown on the deck of this yacht beside me."

"Impossible!" cried the other, turning pale.

"Ask Captain Bilks."

"What is this I hear, Bilks?"

"Oh, a body was thrown aboard in a storm."

"Did you recognize it, captain?"

"Why, no. How could I. He carried it into the cabin."

"But you must have known——"

"I knew nothing about it," interrupted Bilks, surlily. "How was I to recognize your victim, I'd like to know? I never saw him."

"How did this boy discover it?"

"By searching the body, I suppose."

"Ah! And you got that letter?" demanded Darrell eagerly of Fred.

"Yes," was the cool rejoinder. "I got a letter, and something else."

"Where is this letter?"

"In a safe place where you can never get it."

"You defy me again, do you? Very well. Now what else did you find?"

"Put your hand in my pocket and see for yourself."

Darrell thrust his hand into the young man's coat pocket, and pulled out the dagger which Fred had found buried in the bosom of the murdered youth.

"Ha!" he cried, with bulging eyes, "what is this?"

"You ought to recognize your own property."

"And you found this on the body?"

"I found it in the body."

"I see it all now. The sea gave up its dead."

"'Murder will out,' you know."

"I should have been more careful."

"Undoubtedly—for your own safety."

"We shall see about the extent of my safety later on."

"I presume by that you mean to let me share Hazleton's fate, if possible."

"If possible," echoed the other, with a ghastly smile of dark significance.

"That is what I said. You cannot kill me, for I am firmly convinced that Providence will protect my life until I bring you to justice. I have sworn that you shall be hung at my instigation!"

"Bah! Your threats are silly. Tell me how you discovered all that related to this affair. Was it by reading Morgan's letter?"

"No. The letter has not been opened."

"Then how in thunder is it you know all?"

"I refuse to tell you."

"All right. Does this girl know?"

"She knows the whole history of your villainy."

"I am sorry to hear it, as I hoped to marry her."

"That is something you cannot accomplish!" exclaimed Jennie.

"Be assured," he returned, imperturbably, "that it does not worry me in the least. I have possession of this fortune, which is all I want, and I had an idea of gaining it in a legitimate way rather than rob you."

"You are unprincipled enough to do anything!" she cried, angrily.

"Denial would be useless," he replied, coolly.

There was no provoking him in this manner; he had too much brass.

At this moment Mr. Benson reappeared.

"Well, Benson, what do you want now?" asked Darrell.

A peculiar glance passed between Benson and Bilks.

"I have come to speak to the captain," said Benson, sententiously.

"Ah! Then please finish in a hurry, as I wish to continue my conversation with this confounded young cub."

"Have you spoken to the men?" asked Bilks.

"Ay, sir; they are all with you," replied the officer.

"Where are we now?" asked Bilks.

"The island is down on the horizon two miles."

"And we are heading for Florida?"

"Directly, sir."

"Very good. You are sure of every man?"

"Perfectly. They are only too eager to join you."

"The crew of the yacht are all confined below, ain't they?"

"Every man, and a guard mounted over them."

"Then I think it will be safe to proceed."

"Undoubtedly so, sir, as far as the men are concerned."

"Ah, Bilks," interposed Darrell, who showed considerable curiosity at this ambiguous conversation, "what is in the wind? You speak strangely."

"Oh, nothing much," said Bilks, laughing nervously, and motioning to Benson.

"But I insist upon knowing, my dear fellow," said Darrell, warmly.

"You shall, then, if you are determined, only——"

"No objections, Bilks."

"Very well, Darrell. You are a prisoner!"

"A prisoner?" echoed the other, in alarm.

"Yes. I and my men have taken possession of this yacht and the treasure, which we mean to divide between us, and if you so much as lift your hand in opposition, Mr. Benson, my first officer, will certainly blow your brains out with the pistol he is now holding in his hand!"

CHAPTER VIII.

ALL FOR GOLD.

HAD the crack of doom sounded in his ears, Darrell could not have been more thoroughly astonished. He bounded up from his chair, uttering a hoarse cry of rage, such as might have been vented by a wild beast goaded with red-hot irons. His whole smiling demeanor was transformed, and he now appeared the incarnation of fury.

"You lie! curse you! you lie!" he howled, in his impotent rage, and with a spring he fell upon Bilks, and his long, sinuous fingers closed upon the captain's wind-pipe pretty forcibly.

But a sharp "click! click!" close beside his ear brought him to his senses, and wheeling about, he stared down the barrel of Benson's revolver.

"This would have been a pretty scene if I had been absent," said Benson.

"Yes," returned Darrell, furiously, "I would have killed him, the traitor!"

Benson laughed, and the captain, blue in the face, who had been staggering along the bulk-head, struck Darrell square in the face.

The ship-owner scowled, but dared not lift a finger in defense, for he saw that he was as much at the mercy of these men as Fred was.

"Ah!" exclaimed Roland, with intense satisfaction. "I can laugh now. You are no better off than I am, you rascal. I really enjoy this."

"You shall not enjoy *anything* much longer," growled Bilks, surlily.

"Oh, yes I shall," said Fred, gayly.

"We shall see," replied Bilks, in fierce tones. "I remember the choking you gave me in the water, and shall have my revenge on you soon."

"Fire away, old son," was the careless reply.

"Benson," said Bilks, "lock them in here for the present, and come out here on deck. I wish to see how we are going."

"Very well, sir," replied the first officer, and a sardonic smile crossed his face that, being observed by the captain, perplexed him.

When they went out on deck, there were several sailors up in the rigging, apparently clewing up a sail.

Benson led the captain directly beneath the men, and called his at-

tention to a black object floating in the water, half a league off their starboard quarter.

"Can you tell what that object is?" he asked.

"It looks like a wreck."

"So I imagined, but it seems to float rapidly."

"Lend me your glass," said Bilks.

Benson handed him his telescope, and the captain placed it to his eye and directed it upon the dark object.

"It is not a wreck after all. It is a whale," he said, at length.

"A whale!"

"Yes. You can see it spouting."

"You must be mistaken, sir."

"No," said Bilks, adjusting the glass to his eye again; "it is very plain."

Seeing that his attention was attracted to the dark object again, Benson made a rapid sign to one of the sailors up in the rigging, who held a running block in his hand, and stepped back.

The next instant there sounded a cry aloft, and before the captain could comprehend what occurred, down came the block, it struck him on the head, and he fell to the deck an inanimate heap, covered with blood. The sailors hastily ran up and surrounded him, while the men in the rigging hurried down to the deck.

"Good Heaven!" exclaimed Benson. "The captain is killed!"

"How did it happen?" asked Taylor, the second mate.

"A block fell from above."

"Do you think it was an accident?"

"I suppose so."

"Which one of the men was up in the rigging?"

"There were several."

"Have they all come down?"

"Yes."

"Look out, and I'll lift him up."

The sailors moved back, and Taylor raised Bilks from the deck.

"He isn't dead!" he exclaimed.

"Is it possible? The blow was fearful," said Benson.

"Carry him into the cabin," said Taylor to the men.

"No," returned Benson, decidedly. "Our prisoners are in there."

"What prisoners?" asked Taylor.

"Roland, Jennie, and Mr. Darrell."

"Mr. Darrell?"

"Why, yes, didn't the men tell you what he did?"

"No."

"He threatened to shoot the captain."

"What for?"

"Merely because the captain claimed a small portion of the treasure for us and the men as a recompense for our arduous trouble."

"That is bad."

"Yes, indeed. Don't you think it fair we should have a share?"

"Of course I do."

"See what a risk we have run."

"That is so."

"Besides that, the fortune belongs to neither of them; but to the girl."

"The captain is seriously injured, I fear, Mr. Benson."

"If he should die, it would make no difference to us, would it?"

"Not with me. I always detested the surly brute."

"And so did I. In view of this accident, I assume command."

"That is perfectly proper under the circumstances."

"Well, then," turning to the men, "carry the captain down into the fo'castle until we can find better quarters for him, and two of you come into the cabin with me to bind the prisoners."

"Ay, ay, sir," replied the sailors.

Mr. Taylor walked away, and the Lascar approached Benson.

"How I do dat?" he whispered, guardedly.

"Splendid, Jim. I will pay you well for it. My only regret is that you did not heave the block down on his head with sufficient force to finish him. But never mind; he has got a broken skull from which he will not recover in a hurry, and long before he has regained his health we will have this treasure for ourselves."

The black nodded and grinned, then glided away.

The prisoners in the cabin had witnessed the whole scene through one of the windows, and the culpability of the treacherous Benson was only too evident to them. Darrell smiled bitterly, and turned to Fred.

"You saw that, didn't you?" he asked.

"Yes. It was a dirty piece of work."

"Now you can see to what degradation man will descend for gold."

"Taking yourself as a fair example."

"Certainly. It seems, though, that the fever is epidemic!"

"Great heavens!" exclaimed Jennie, in horrified accents, "I wish that the gold had been buried with Mr. Morgan, rather than incite these wretched men to sell their souls by bloodshed for possession of it."

At this moment Benson entered the cabin with the two sailors.

"I have come to fasten you up," said he to Darrell.

"Ah, you played your points well," replied the ship-owner; "for I see you are trying to get that money for yourself."

"If you refer to that block falling, it was an accident."

"Oh! Of course!" returned Darrell, ironically.

"Do your duty, men," continued Benson, coldly.

The two sailors approached Darrell to bind him.

"Do you imagine I am going to quietly submit to this?" asked Darrell.

"You will get hurt if you don't," replied Benson. "I am in possession of this craft now, and I will make you pay dearly for any resistance you may be foolish enough to make."

Darrell drew a revolver from his pocket and cocked it.

"On the contrary," he exclaimed, "it is I who am master here."

"Ha! you mean to resist?"

"I simply mean to enforce my authority."

"So much the worse for you, Mr. Darrell."

"You can do nothing."

"Oh, yes: you shall walk the plank."

"It will be over your corpse, then," said Darrell.

He raised his weapon, aimed at Benson, and fired.

"I am shot!" cried the officer, clapping his hand to his bosom.

Staggering back, he reeled blindly for a moment, then fell to the floor.

"This is the way I crush all who oppose me," said Darrell.

The two sailors were mute with dismay; but Fred spoke.

"Here is another crime for which you must pay the penalty."

"I am suppressing a mutineer. That is no crime," said Darrell.

"The extenuating epithet 'mutineer' will not save you."

"See here, Roland, I am losing patience with your croaking."

"You are apprehensive of your disagreeable future, in my opinion."

"Shut up! I will soon undeceive you of your chimera that you are a Heavenly emissary, by swinging you from a yard by the neck. Here, you two gaping lubbers, take him out of here, and rig a block from the mainmast-yard. Refuse, and I will shoot you on the spot."

The sailors saw that there was no alternative but to obey, and both caught hold of Fred and dragged him out on deck.

CHAPTER IX.

A STRUGGLE FOR LIBERTY.

UPON going out on deck, followed by the two sailors who held Fred, Darrell assembled all the men, told them that he was master of the yacht still, and would kill the first man who refused to obey him; ordered them to hang Fred from the yard, and sent two sailors into the cabin to look after the first officer, Benson.

His harangue was short and decisive, and he quelled all the rebellion with the few words that Bilks had aroused by working upon the cupidity of the sailors. Jennie had followed them out, and mute, eloquent glances were exchanged between her and Roland, but she said nothing.

A line, with a noose in the end, was roven from the yard, and as Fred was already bound, they adjusted it around his neck, and prepared to swing him into eternity.

"You see what you get for interfering with me," said Darrell.

"I am not dead yet," was the youth's calm reply.

"Nevertheless, you will soon be food for the fishes."

"Your boasting is laughable," said Fred, pityingly, and he laughed.

The ship-owner betrayed the utmost astonishment at the persistent defiance of this singularly temperamental young man in the very face of death.

"I cannot understand it, unless he is crazy," he muttered; then, turning to the two sailors manning the other end of the rope, he added aloud:

"Hoist away, my hearties!"

The men caught the rope up higher, when there sounded a pistol-shot and a cry. They saw Darrell fall, and a tiny stream of blood ooze from his body.

One look showed them who had fired the shot, for Jennie still held a smoking revolver in her hand as she stood beside the skylight.

John Taylor, the second mate, ran to Darrell's side and examined him, while the two sailors dropped the rope, and Fred exclaimed, confidently:

"I knew that I was not yet to die!"

"He is not dead," said Taylor to the sailors grouped around him.

One of the sailors approached Jennie threateningly.

"Give me that pistol!" he exclaimed.

"Certainly; here it is," she replied, as she handed it to him.

"Now come with me."

"What are you going to do with me?"

"Lock you in the cabin."

"Very well, sir; lead the way."

He caught her by the arm and led her away, followed by Fred's grateful gaze.

Taylor had bared Darrell's bosom, and discovered that, although the bullet had struck a rib and glanced off, it left a painful wound.

Darrell had lost consciousness and lay like a dead man.

Bandaging up his wound, they laid him in a hammock on deck.

"Take that fellow away!" said Taylor, pointing at Fred.

"Whar'll we stow him?" asked a sailor.

"You can secure him down in the hold with the rest," replied Taylor, who now assumed command, as Bilks, Darrell and Benson were disabled.

The man conducted Fred down to his ship-mates, and left him there.

When Darrell recovered his senses he was wild with fury, and wanted to kill Fred outright; but Taylor was a sensible person, and told him that he must subdue this paroxysm of rage, or he might become seriously ill.

"What have you done with him?" he demanded.

"He is confined in the hold, sir," replied Taylor.

"And that rascally girl—that spitfire—that vixen?"

"She is locked in your cabin."

"Ah!" he groaned, and as a twinge of pain shot through his throbbing wound he ground his teeth savagely. "When I feel better I will fix them for this! Oh, how it pains! Get me some arnica, will you?"

Taylor did so, and it cooled and eased the wound.

Darrell remained in the hammock, and having enlisted the services and friendship of Taylor by promising to handsomely reward him, he patiently waited to get well, all the while cursing his ill-fortune roundly.

The prisoners in the hold were regularly served with their rations, and thus two days passed by, the yacht meeting fair weather, and bounding over the surging sea like a race horse, with all her snowy canvas spread to the favorable breeze with which they were blessed. In a day or two more Darrell hoped to make port. In the meantime, Jennie had not been idle.

After finding herself a prisoner in the cabin, her first care was to make a minute examination of the place. Among other things she did was to sound the bulkheads of the cabin, when she heard a voice on the other side.

"Jennie!" it sounded faintly.

"Oh, Mr. Roland, is that you?" she called, as she recognized the voice.

"Ay. Are you alone in the cabin?"

"All alone. I have been made a prisoner."

"Come down here the first chance you get."

"Where are you?"

"In the hold, with my men."

"But how can I get in there?"

"Through the door in the bulkhead."

"Ah, yes, I did not observe it before," she replied.

But upon trying to open the door she found it was locked!

This fact she conveyed to Fred.

"Then," said he, "you must try to pick the lock with a piece of wire."

Of course she was ignorant of how to do this, but he instructed her, and she took her shoe buttoner, straightened out the hook, then bent

it to an angle with the handle, and after working at the lock for several tiresome hours, she managed to unlock the door.

This door was hidden behind a curtain, which accounted for her inability to see it until he told her where to find it.

Having opened the door, she took some matches and entered the hold, where she saw the poor yachtsmen lying about in various attitudes, bound hand and foot. They were stiff from their contracted positions, and she offered to sever their bonds, but Fred prevented it wisely.

"No, no," he said, "the time has not yet come. If you cut the cords now, the men who come to give us our rations will discover it, and sound the alarm before we could do anything. You must endeavor to gain access to the deck to-night, and lock the watch below down in the fore-castle. That will leave us five men on deck with whom to contend. If we can overcome them, we can save our lives and seize the yacht."

"I will try to do as you say."

"Who brings you your meals?"

"The Lascar, Jim."

"Good! These Lascars are all drinking men. When he comes in again, strive to induce him to drink. You will find several bottles of cognac brandy in a locker under the berth."

"What good will that do?"

"Wait, and I will tell you. On the wall you will see a small glass compartment filled with medicines, each bottle of which is numbered. Take a half teaspoonful of the white powder in the bottle marked No. 4 and put it in a bottle of the brandy. Then shake the bottle well to dissolve the powder, and when the Lascar drinks it he will sleep so soundly that nothing will awaken him for several hours. You can then gain access to the deck in order to entrap the watch below."

The girl nodded, and hearing some one opening the hatchway, she fled through the door, closed it after her, and dropped the curtain over it.

That night, when Jim came in with her supper, she had the bottle of brandy drugged, and set about to catch him.

Assuming her sweetest smile, she pointed to a seat, and said:

"Sit down until I am through, Jim, I want to speak to you."

"Yes, ma'am," returned the dark-skinned fellow, showing his white, even teeth in an innocent smile, and he complied, delighted at the chance.

"Will we soon reach port, Jim?" she asked.

"By'm by. Two day, dat for sure," he replied.

"Oh, dear me. Two days more! I am awfully lonesome, Jim. You see I have nobody to talk to, and it makes me feel sad."

"Too bad, ma'am," said Jim, scratching his head.

"I have one consolation though, Jim."

"Yes, ma'am. Wha' dat?"

"Some brandy. I drink it all the time to keep my spirits from flagging."

"Yo' like brandy?"

"Very much; don't you?"

"Oh!" he exclaimed, rolling his black eyes, and smacking his lips expressively.

"Will you come in here and talk to me every day, if I give you some, Jim?"

"Sure! sure!" he replied eagerly, and only too glad of the chance.

"Very well, but you can only have one glassful at a time."

"Oh!" he grunted, his face lengthening considerably.

"Isn't that enough for you?"

"Me like much one time."

"But, don't you see, if you drink a great deal at one time, the bottle will be emptied too soon; then you won't come in to see me often."

"Dat not make no dif'rence."

"Yes, it does. Do you want to try it now?"

"Sure!"

"You will find the bottle on that shelf."

He laid the key of the door upon the table, arose, took the bottle from the shelf, and suddenly darted out the door with it, as quick as a flash.

She saw that his cupidity had overcome him, and by treacherously stealing the whole bottle he meant to make sure of having more than one drink at a time.

Jennie burst out laughing, and hastily caught up the key which he

had forgotten in his flight and concealed it. She did not see anything of him until the next night, for which negligence she was forced to do without her breakfast and dinner. When he came in he looked sheepish, but said nothing. Instead, he commenced to look for the key which he complained he had lost. Of course he did not find it, nor would he dare complain of having lost it while robbing the fair young prisoner of the brandy, as he did not know what Darrell might do to him for his perfidy and carelessness.

"Jim, you are a thief!" exclaimed Jennie.

"No," he replied, with a cunning look. "You give Jim only little. I will take all."

"Ah, you have not drank it yet?"

"No. I carry it in de fo'castle. De men dey see an' steal him bottle."

"Did the men drink your brandy?"

"No. I steal him back. To-night I drink him so dey not again get."

"Oh, and you will not come to speak to me any more, now you have got it all."

"Yes, ma'am. I come ebery night sure."

Saying which, as she had finished her meal, he carried away the dishes.

"To-night will do it!" she muttered, when he was gone.

Going through the door into the hold, she told Fred what occurred, and with a knife she cut his bonds and those of all the crew. Scarcely had she done this, when the two sailors who were going to hang Fred came down into the hold with rations for the prisoners, and the girl fled.

Night had fallen on the sea, dark and gloomy.

She had another source of danger to apprehend.

The helmsman was close to her door, and in order to gain the waist she was obliged to pass him. Extinguishing her lamp, she softly opened the door and peered out. At that moment the quartermaster stood staring directly at the door, and saw her the moment she opened it.

Her heart leaped up in her throat, but she boldly walked out.

"Hullo, thar!" he exclaimed in surprise. "What're ye doin' out here?"

"I am going up on deck," was her reply.

"I'm blowed if ye are!" he growled.

"Out of my way!" she cried. "You shall not detain me."

And slipping past him like a shadow, she ran across the deck, and made her way forward. He did not dare to follow her, for if he left the wheel the yacht would fall off of her course, so he bawled to the watch:

"Avast there, you lubbers, and stop that ere woming!"

Jennie was too quick for them, for she had reached the fore-castle by this time, and slipped down the stairs ere they saw her.

A curious sight met her view, that strangely reminded her of the palace scene in the story of "The Sleeping Beauty," only that in this case, instead of handsome cavaliers and princes, it was a horde of ugly Lascars and depraved white men who were stretched about the place in every attitude conceivable, fast asleep. Among them she saw Jim soundly snoring in a bunk, while another sailor held the now emptied bottle of drugged wine in his nerveless hands. It was evident that after Jim had taken a liberal libation the other sailors discovered him, wrested the coveted bottle from him, passed it around, each man taking a pull at it, and the result was that the narcotic in the bottle had overcome them with a lassitude which ended in profound slumber. This was more than she could have wished for. All the men but the watch on deck were now perfectly helpless, and at the mercy of the liberated yachtsmen, who by this time had, no doubt, captured their two jailers.

As she stood thus contemplating the scene of sleepiness, she suddenly heard a terrible furore up on deck—the shouts of men, the shuffle of feet, blows, oaths and other noises of a warlike character, and she knew that the brave yachtsmen had come up out of the hold, and were upon their enemies, struggling for the mastery.

None of the combatants were armed, and relied wholly upon their physical strength to gain the supremacy. She had no doubt of the result of the battle, for the yachtsmen outnumbered their enemies two to one. Suddenly a man appeared at the top of the companionway.

"Help! help!" he cried. "Come up here, my men, and assist us!"

The girl shuddered, for she recognized the voice of Ralph Darrell.

A moment later there sounded a patter of footsteps approaching

her, and Jennie was petrified to see him run down into the fore-castle.

There was a lamp swinging from the beams overhead that shed a dim light throughout the place, and in an instant he recognized her.

"Ha!" he cried, white with terror, "you here?"

"Yes," she replied, bravely, "and your wicked crew will soon be prisoners, with yourself."

"They at least have not got me yet," he cried, fiercely, "and I shall have an atom of revenge before they take me. Through your accursed interference those fellows have been liberated, and we can owe our present trouble to no one else. Ah! they come! But you shall die first!"

He sprang at her ferociously, and caught her by the throat.

"Fred—Fred!" she shrieked, wildly, "save me from this monster!"

"Unhand that girl, scoundrel!" shouted a ringing voice close behind Darrell, and the next moment Roland had him in his clutches, the girl fell back out of the way, and, clasped in each other's arms, Darrell and Roland fell upon the floor in a deadly struggle.

The young captain did not have much trouble to overcome his adversary, for Darrell had been weakened by loss of blood, and what little strength he had was superficially induced by the intense excitement under which he was laboring. Getting him down, panting and exhausted, upon his back, Fred knelt upon his chest, and had him bound in a trice, the rascal thundering and roaring out the vilest curses all the while, to Jennie's abhorrence, as she silently viewed the scene.

At the moment Fred had secured Darrell, Jennie uttered a cry:

"Look out, Fred!"

"What is it?"

"A madman!"

"Where?"

"Behind you!"

"Ah!" he cried, wheeling around, "Captain Bilks!"

The captain presented a horrible spectacle.

His head was swathed in bandages, his face was livid, his blood-shot eyes glared, and in his hands he held a marlinspike.

To all appearances he was stark crazy.

Just as Fred turned around, he uttered a hoarse bellow, and made a pass with the marlinspike at the young man's head.

Fred sprang back, and the marlinspike missed its mark, flew out of his hands, and striking Darrell upon the head, he became senseless.

Bilks glared around the fore-castle a moment, and uttering those strange, inhuman cries, he ran up on deck, and Fred followed him.

One of the sailors happened to be in the captain's way, and seizing the man in his arms, he hurled him across the deck, and clambering upon the guard rail, he sprang over the side into the sea.

That was the last they ever saw of the wretched maniac.

Going down into the fore-castle again, Fred found Benson rolling about in his bunk, groaning horribly, and praying in a half audible voice.

"Benson!" he exclaimed, triumphantly, "you are my prisoner again."

"Ah!" he replied, faintly. "I heard the noise of a struggle."

"We are in possession of the yacht."

"I am glad of it. We did wrong. But the thirst for wealth was upon us. Oh, why did I criminate myself for nothing."

"Captain Bilks just jumped into the sea."

"Committed suicide, did he?"

"Ay—that blow he got on the head turned his brain."

"God forgive me, I am his murderer! It was I who induced Lascar Jim to drop the block down on his head with intent to kill him."

"I know it."

"Do not think it is fear of the penalty of my crime that troubles me—it is not that; it is fear for my soul, Roland—fear for my soul. I am dying."

"Why, has your wound taken a bad turn?"

"Inflammation and blood-poisoning have set in. Every moment I fear will be my last. Forgive the grievous harm I have done you, and pray for my soul, Roland. It is ungenerous not to forgive a repentant enemy when he is dying. Say you will forgive me."

"Yes, yes, Benson, I do forgive you. I am sure you were always a good fellow, and an insensate desire for gold overcame your natural honesty."

Shortly after this the poor wretch fell asleep, and never again opened his eyes. The yachtsmen gave him a decent burial, and not one of the men who stood around the shotted canvas in which his body had been sewn could feel much resentment against him when, after Fred finished reading the burial service from a Bible, the body was dropped into the sea, and sank out of sight.

All of the barkmen were secured, with Darrell, so that it would be impossible for them to escape, and were confined down in the hold. The cabin was given exclusively to Jennie, and Fred bunked in the fore-castle with his men.

They did not go to St. Augustine, but continued on up to New York, as Jennie did not desire to return to scenes that could only inspire her with sadness. The night before they entered the harbor, Fred and Jennie sat on the deck of the Sea Angel, and drawing Mr. Morgan's letter from his pocket, he handed it to her to read.

CHAPTER X.

"SHIP ON FIRE!"

WHEN Jennie finished perusing the letter she looked up at Fred with tears in her eyes, and a sorrowful look on her face.

"The letter seems to affect you," he observed.

"Yes. Mr. Morgan was a wicked man, and atoned too late."

"How?" asked Fred.

"Because it was privation and want that killed my poor mother."

"You don't say so? That was sad."

"Yes," she replied, tremulously; "when I read this letter my grief and anger are augmented. He made a full confession of his perfidious conduct, but it appeared that Ralph Darrell was the prime instigator of the project."

"Thank goodness, he will soon be made to suffer the extreme legal penalty for his crimes. You will then be avenged."

"Satisfaction as it is to the mind, it will not recall the life of my mother. Had Mr. Morgan made the restitution sooner, she might now be alive. As it is, I am rich, but alone in the world."

"Not alone, Jennie," said Fred, gravely.

"It is true, I have good friends."

"There is one who cherishes you more."

"Ah!" she exclaimed, blushing violently.

"Do you comprehend me?" he asked. "I love you."

"Mr. Roland!"

"Do not think it is wealth I crave; it is your affection."

"I do not think of this inauspicious gold," she murmured. "I know you love me."

"And you?"

"Fred—you too know that I——"

"Ah, you love me?"

"I do."

"Then, as you will become my wife, you will not be alone in the world."

"No!" she cried, laughingly.

"Fire! fire!" cried a muffled tone at this moment.

"Eh!" exclaimed Fred, springing up in alarm, "what is that?"

"The ship's on fire!" cried the same voice again.

"Great God! Jennie, see there. This is terrible!"

"Why," she replied, turning pale, "flames are coming through the hatchway!"

"Sure enough. We are in a sad plight, indeed."

"Look off the lee, there. Is that not land?"

"Ay! The Long Island shore. Fortunately there is good stiff breeze, and we will reach it in a short time at this rate. I must run into the cabin and get the prisoners out ere it is too late."

Saying which, he hurried aft with the men, flew into the cabin, and bursting open the door in the bulk-head, they went in with lanterns, and found the hold rapidly filling with smoke. There was a large blaze in the middle of the hold, which was rapidly spreading.

In a few minutes all the frightened prisoners were hauled out on deck, and they flew on toward the shore. Darkness is deceiving, and they found that the land was much nearer than they at first supposed. It was just below Sheepshead Bay, and they were aground before they knew they would strike. The boat was launched, and all the men were rowed ashore just as the flames leaped out through the crevices in the deck, caught the tarred ropes of the rigging, and set fire to the rails.

By some good fortune, a fire-patrol boat was passing up the bay at the time, and steaming to the burning yacht, they set the water spouting, and soon extinguished the flames.

The yacht was a complete wreck, but the cases containing the fortune were saved, and were taken with all hands on a lighter, which carried them to the city. Here all the prisoners of the bark, including Darrell, were given in charge of the police, on a charge of mutiny, piracy and murder. The cases were stored in a warehouse, and the crew were given some money from the thousand dollars Morgan had given Edwin Hazleton, and dispersed, first promising to meet Fred in two days at the hotel where he and Jennie stopped.

After the men were gone, Fred and Jennie were married, and the following day the gold was taken from the cases, deposited in a bank, and Fred found himself suddenly possessed, not only of a pretty wife, but a large fortune.

The sailors appeared in due time, were liberally rewarded for their honesty, and later on appeared as witnesses in the court when the crew of the Blizzard was tried and condemned.

Ralph Darrell was hung, his men all served terms in prison, and Edwin Hazleton's foul murder was amply avenged. In time Fred purchased a yacht, modeled after the Sea Angel, and manned it with the same crew who had stood by him in his many vicissitudes. He takes frequent trips to different points, and is invariably accompanied by his charming young wife, upon whom the crew look with most paternal affection.

Pleasurable as these trips are to Fred, yet they are a sort of ghastly charm to him, his men and the yacht reminding him vividly of the strange, mysterious freak of nature that cast up the body of the murdered boy on the deck of the Sea Angel, the finding of which lead them into the perilous adventures on the briny deep which soon followed.

[THE END.]

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By Tom Teaser (and Other Stories)
42 The Armorer's Son.....By Allyn Draper
43 Behind the Scenes; or, Out With A New York
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